



California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland

Newsletter of the CFCP
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Menghetti Farm Preserved in Stanislaus County

The Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT), CFCP, and the Modesto-based Great Valley Center (GVC) recently partnered to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on the Menghetti Farm in Stanislaus County. The CFCP and GVC provided funding while CVFT provided project coordination and holds the easement. This is the first CFCP-funded agricultural conservation easement on irrigated cropland in Stanislaus County.

The Menghetti Farm is located about 2.5 miles west of the City of Modesto and its Sphere of Influence, and currently supports a walnut and almond orchard with its Prime soils. The 155-acre property borders State Highway 132, which is a major commute corridor between Modesto and the Bay Area. Residential development is encroaching towards the farm from two different directions: north from Salida and east from Modesto. The landowners extinguished two of the four legal parcels and reserved the right to maintain separate easements on two equally-sized parcels. The Modesto Irrigation District provides readily available and inexpensive water to the farm.



*Almond trees on the Menghetti Farm near the City of Modesto.
Photo courtesy of Central Valley Farmland Trust.*

As of 2007, Stanislaus ranked No. 6 among California counties in total agricultural production at about \$2.4 billion. Despite the efforts of local government and organizations to preserve Stanislaus County's

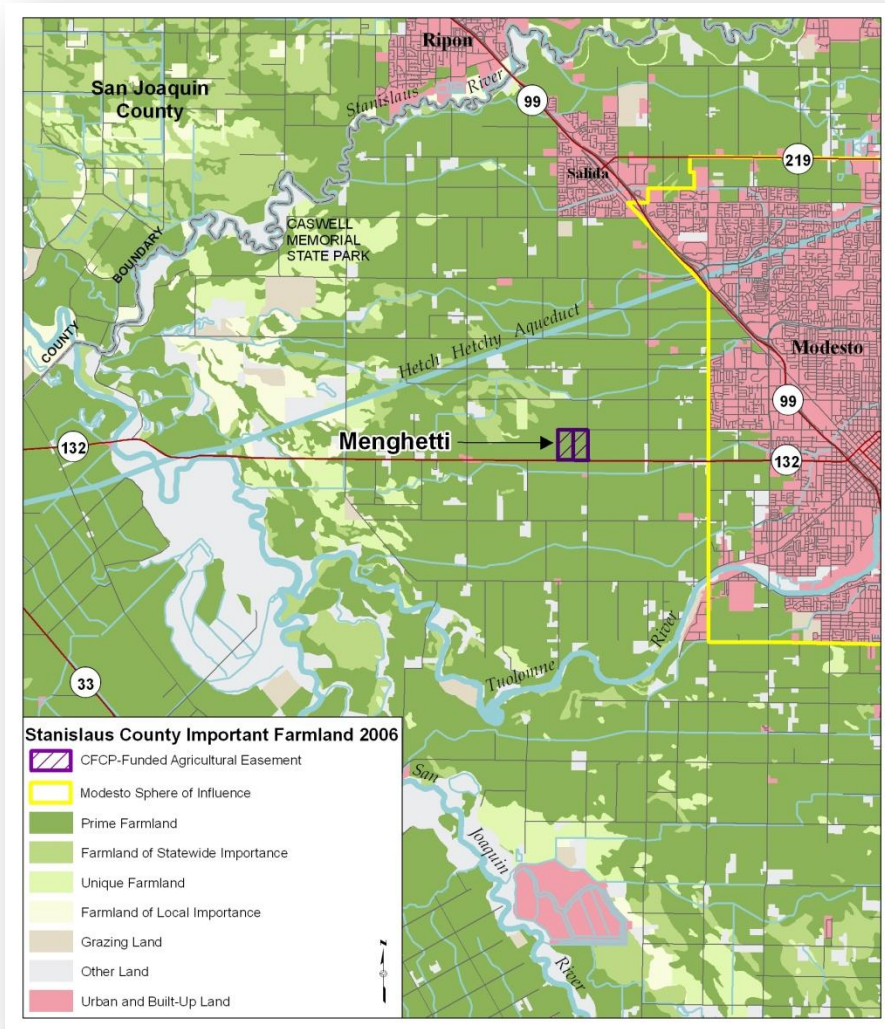
agricultural heritage, nearly 6,500 acres of farmland and grazing land was reclassified to non-agricultural use from 2004 to 2006, according to DOC's Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program.

"The Menghetti family's thoughtful long-term commitment to ensure that this rich farmland will remain available for the production of food for future generations is a gift to the people of California and a role model for long-term planning in the Central Valley," said Brian Leahy, assistant director in charge of the Division of Land Resource Protection.

The agricultural conservation easement was purchased with \$920,845 in funding from the CFCP and \$231,211 in funding from the GVC.

The CVFT is a private, nonprofit, regionally-based land trust working with landowners who want to conserve their farmland for future generations. The organization works with landowners in Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties. For more information, visit www.valleyfarmland.org.

Founded in 1997, GVC is a private, non-profit organization that supports activities and other organizations working to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of California's Central Valley, in partnership with the University of California, Merced. For more information on the GVC, please visit its Website at www.greatvalley.org.



The 155-acre Menghetti Farm is located a few miles west of Modesto along State Highway 132, which is a major commute corridor between Modesto and the Bay Area.

Making a Difference with CFCP Planning Grants

The CFCP has recently completed a number of Planning Grants with Land Trusts. The grants facilitated local agricultural land conservation initiatives and are briefly summarized here.

Solano Land Trust: Solano Agricultural Conservation Easement Plan Implementation, Phase 2

In this planning grant, Solano Land Trust evaluated ten potential agricultural conservation easement transaction projects that were identified as strategic in a previous planning grant. Two additional easement projects in the high-priority areas of Suisun Valley and Green Valley were also evaluated for further project development. Solano Land Trust met with the landowners of the strategic properties,

evaluated landowner applications, and selected the highest-ranking properties according to the land trust's scoring criteria.

In developing the potential easement projects, Solano Land Trust obtained six letters of intent from landowners, reviewed preliminary title reports for title concerns, and prepared and submitted grant applications to potential easement acquisition funders.

The appraising objective required the land trust to prepare appraisal instructions on a minimum of six selected projects, solicit bids, and review draft appraisals. Once the land trust completed its review of the draft appraisals, it submitted them to the landowners and potential easement funders for review and approval. A total of seven appraisals were completed and four grant applications were prepared and submitted to potential easement acquisition funders. All four grant applications have been conditionally approved for funding by the targeted funders.

Middle Mountain Foundation: Agricultural Land Protection Agreement Project

Middle Mountain Foundation developed a strategic plan to identify and seek protection of prime agricultural lands and natural areas by assisting landowners in securing conservation easements. Middle Mountain Foundation identified six agricultural areas in the northern Sacramento Valley counties of Colusa, Sutter and Yuba to concentrate its efforts with the ultimate goal of securing four agricultural conservation easements over two years.

Land Trust of Napa County: Capturing Opportunity: Facilitating Farmland Preservation

The purpose of this grant was twofold. The first objective was to provide education to Napa County agricultural landowners and professionals about the Pension Protection Act's enhanced federal conservation tax benefits for conservation easement donations in 2006 and 2007. This objective was met by the hiring of a Director of Land Protection, preparing marketing materials for mailings and workshops, and holding educational workshops on the new tax benefits of donated agricultural conservation easements.

The second objective was to implement a new application process for the donation of agricultural conservation easements. The implementation process included developing the new application; reviewing and ranking submitted applications, and negotiating, drafting, and obtaining legal review of the proposed agricultural conservation easements.

Thanks to the efforts of the Land Trust of Napa County pursuant to the planning grant, the land trust obtained twelve donated agricultural conservation easements, with a total of 911 acres protected in 2007 and 2008. These easements, including others that may be donated to the land trust in 2009, have all taken advantage of the enhanced federal tax benefits provided by the Pension Protection Act.

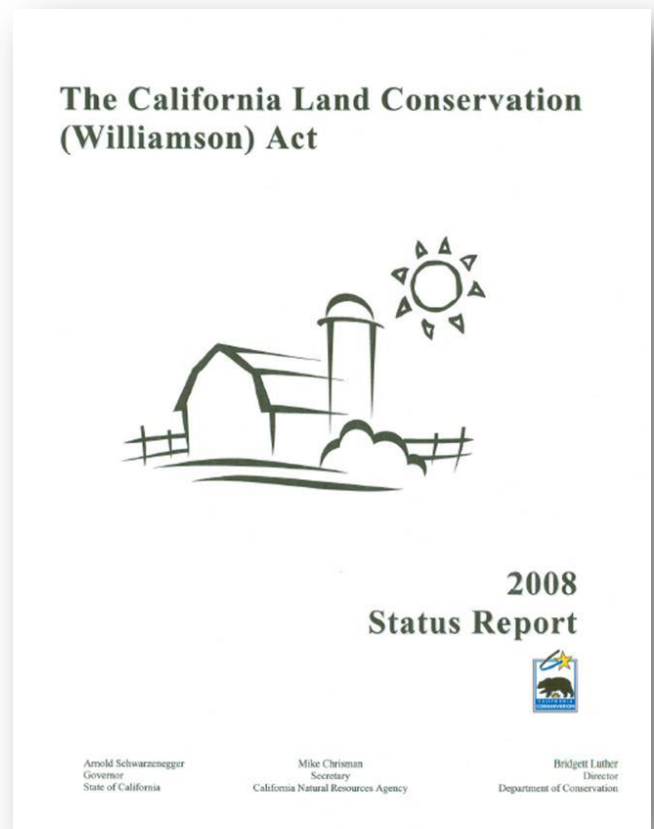
Although the bulk of CFCP grant awards are for agricultural conservation easement acquisitions, the program also offers planning and technical assistance grants that support agricultural land conservation and easement acquisition work. Activities and costs that may be supported through overall conservation planning work may include appraisals, surveys, title review, staff and consultant costs, and other costs directly related to bringing agricultural conservation easements to the acquisition stage. CFCP planning grant funds are one of the few sources of seed money to translate landowner interest in agricultural conservation easements into actual conservation projects. For more information about CFCP planning grants, please visit our [Website](#).

Williamson Act Status Report (2008) Released

The Department of Conservation's Williamson Act Program has recently released the 2008 Williamson Act Status Report. The biennial report captures and analyzes statewide enrollment as of January 1, 2006 and January 1, 2007. Highlights include:

- ▶ As of January 1, 2007, 16.6 million acres were enrolled under the Williamson Act statewide.
- ▶ Statewide enrollment has been slightly declining every year since 2005.
- ▶ Statewide, nonrenewal initiations have increased each year since 2001 and reached a new high in 2007.
- ▶ Statewide, the trend in the total amount of cumulative nonrenewal acreage hints at reaching an all-time high within the next few years. Nonetheless, statewide cumulative nonrenewal acreage made up only 3.2 percent of total statewide enrollment in 2007.
- ▶ Participating local governments claimed \$37.7 million in Open Space Subvention Act payments for the partial replacement of property tax revenue losses associated with contract enrollment as of January 2007. Nearly all of the enrollment data for the Status Report were gathered from the subvention applications.

This report is mandated by State law and is primarily a report to the Legislature. However, this report is also made available to other audiences, including local governments, researchers, and interested statewide organizations. All audiences may find this report useful as a tool for educational purposes, for anticipating farmland conversion trends, for tracking land use trends, for facilitating program comparisons among participating local governments, and for demonstrating the Williamson Act's relative effectiveness. To view the report, [click here](#).



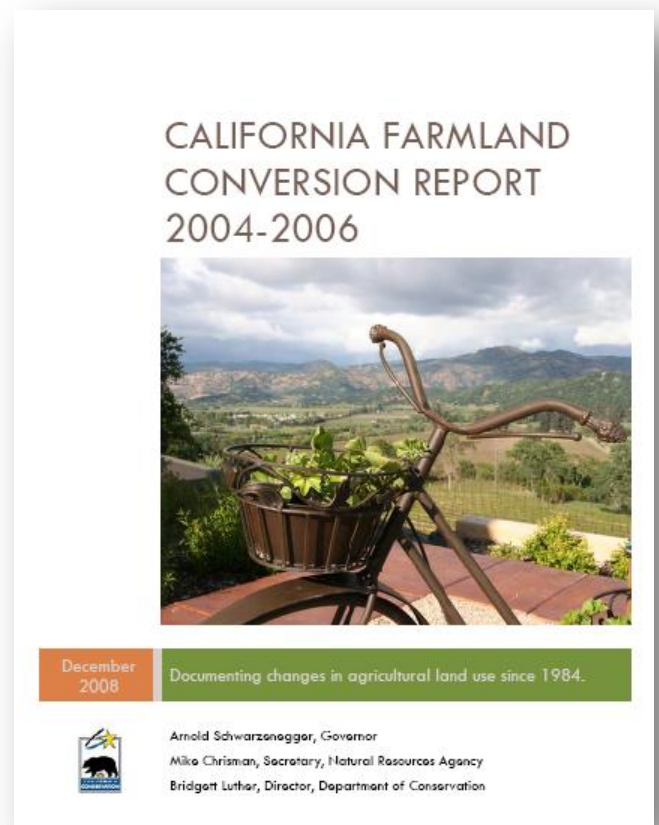
Front cover of the 2008 Williamson Act Status Report

California Farmland Conversion Report 2004-2006 Released

The Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) has recently released its latest Farmland Conversion Report, covering the 2004 to 2006 period. Notable findings include:

- ▶ Irrigated farmland losses accelerated compared with the 2002 to 2004 period.
- ▶ Farm and grazing lands decreased by 275 square miles (176,014 acres) in the state.
- ▶ Prime Farmland decreased by 81,247 acres, breaking the 78,575-acre record set during the 2002-2004 reporting period.
- ▶ California's Urban and Built-up Land grew by 102,010 acres, nearly 160 square miles, between 2004 and 2006. Conversions to Other Land totaled 73,789 acres over the same time period.
- ▶ Urbanization was concentrated in a smaller number of counties relative to the 2004 update: while the top ten counties comprised 65 percent of new urban lands between 2002 and 2004, the figure was 74 percent during the 2006 mapping cycle.
- ▶ Riverside County alone accounted for 23 percent of the newly developed land.

The goal of the FMMP is to provide consistent, timely, and accurate data to decision makers for use in assessing present status, reviewing trends, and planning for the future of California's agricultural land resources. Approximately 96 percent of the privately owned land in the state (48.2 million acres) was mapped this update cycle by the FMMP. Each map is updated every two years, providing an archive for tracking land use change over time. This is the eleventh Farmland Conversion Report produced by the FMMP. To view the Farmland Conversion Report, [click here](#).



Front cover of the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program's latest conversion report.

CFCP / DOC News Updates:

Budget Update – The recent adoption of the 2009-10 Budget resulted in the appropriation of \$7.5 million in local assistance grant funds to the CFCP. These funds are a combination of Proposition 84 funds and Proposition 12 funds that were re-appropriated from previously completed conservation projects. Funds will be available for new grants once state agencies are authorized to commence work on bond funded projects.

Department earns “Climate Action Leader” status: The California Climate Action Registry (CCAR) has recognized DOC as a “Climate Action Leader” for its efforts to determine and reduce its carbon footprint. The CCAR is a private nonprofit organization originally formed by the State of California. The California Registry serves as a voluntary greenhouse gas registry to protect and promote early actions to reduce emissions by organizations. Last year, DOC created a Climate Action Team to gather the data necessary to establish a baseline of the Department's greenhouse gas emissions. To meet minimum CCAR requirements, DOC reported on its two primary emission factors: travel in its fleet vehicles (direct emissions), and electricity used in its facilities (indirect emissions). California Registry members who have verified their emissions inventory earn the status of Climate Action Leaders.

Updated: CFCP Model Agricultural Conservation Easement: The updated model easement and associated checklist are available on the Department's Website [here](#). Grant recipients are encouraged to adopt it to the extent possible, in order to expedite the easement review process. A separate file includes a checklist of the standard easement elements that the CFCP looks for as part of its review process.

Updated: CFCP's Proposition 40-funded grants: To date, the CFCP has completed over 30 agricultural conservation easement and planning grants across the state using Proposition 40 bond funds. The details of these acquisitions – including photos and maps – are available for viewing on the CFCP [Website](#). This growing list of completed projects will be updated periodically.

Upcoming Events:

As part of its 2009 Training and Education Program, the **California Council of Land Trusts** is offering two upcoming workshops: **Climate Change in California** and **Easement & Land Stewardship**. The Climate Change in California workshop (Sept. 3, 9, & 14) will update conservationists on evolving policies and funding mechanisms, new agency requirements for acquisition proposals and ongoing reporting, and the State's adaptation plan that will influence its conservation priorities in the coming years. The Easement & Land Stewardship (Nov. 3-6) workshop is a 3-day course covering all aspects of baseline preparation, monitoring and photo point creation, and includes a field component at the Wind Wolf Preserve in Kern County. For more information please visit www.calandtrusts.org.

Rally 2009, **National Land Conservation Conference** (“Leading and Learning in Uncertain Times”) is being held October 11 – 14 in Portland, Oregon. Rally is the largest land conservation conference in the country, and offers a dynamic opportunity to meet with your colleagues in conservation, advance your skills, and work to solve some of your greatest challenges. To learn more, [click here](#).

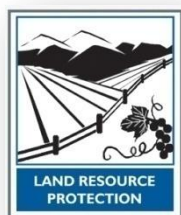
The Great Valley Center's **Sacramento Valley Forum** is a day-long annual event focusing on issues in the Sacramento Valley. This year's theme – **Water: More than a Peripheral Issue** -- focuses on how communities can balance the changing economic, recreational, agricultural, and environmental needs for one of our most precious resources. The forum is being held on October 28 in Chico. To learn more, [click here](#).

The California Farmland Conservancy Program, administered by Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection, is designed to ensure that the state's most valuable farmland can be preserved. Through the program, local governments and nonprofit organizations can receive grants to purchase development rights from willing landowners, thus creating permanent conservation easements.

We hope you've found this issue of *Focus on Farmland* useful and informative. Please contact us with any questions or ideas you have for future editions. Feel free to forward this email to other interested parties.

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